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ENTOMBED

 Saint Andrew's Abbey 
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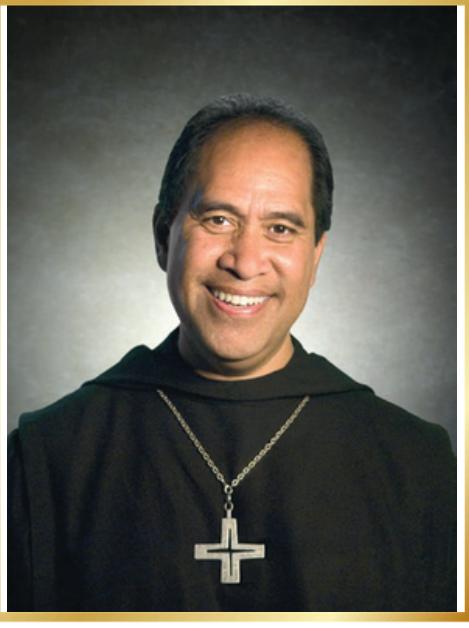
LETTER

From the

BBOT

At the beginning of Lent, our Gospel (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18) reminds us that it **is** possible for us to do holy things like pray and fast, but have very little to do with God, particularly when we do them for the sake of appearance. Jesus calls people who do such things hypocrites: those who live a life that looks religious on the outside, while the heart remains untouched. They tend to focus on outward appearances and the approval of others, rather than genuine interior conversion.

The reason the Lord tells us to, “go to your inner room and pray” is because there is no one there to watch us pray. There is no one there to try to impress with our prayers and pious language.



The “inner room” Jesus talks about in the gospel is not just a place in a house. It is a place in the soul where we don’t have to worry about our image. It is a place in the soul where we don’t have to explain and justify ourselves, where we allow God to see us as we really are: with no makeup, no expensive clothes to make us look good, no achievements, or fancy degrees and certificates to make us look smart and important. The inner room is where we stand before our God, just as He formed us in the womb—naked (!)...and dependent upon Him for sustenance, dependent upon Him for life, dependent upon Him for our worth. It is in this “inner room” where conversion begins. It is a safe place. It is essentially placing ourself in the hands of God.

THE VALYERMO Chronicle

No. 273  Winter/Lent 2026

The **Almsgiving** we will do this Lent will help us to loosen our grip on possessions and allow God space in our hearts to teach us to trust in His providence. The **Fasting** we will do this Lent will help us to loosen our grip on our appetites and allow God space in our lives to teach us the ways of temperance. Fasting will remind us that He alone is our sustenance. The **Prayers** we will offer this Lent will help us to loosen our grip on 'things' and allow God space in our lives to teach us to surrender over everything that is not Him and to cling to Him alone.

Lent is not just about giving up things, but it is about giving God more space, more room in our life. It's about taking time to honestly acknowledge where we have allowed things stuff, people, and attachments to crowd God out of our lives. Lent is the time we surrender these things to Him: to offer them as a sacrifice, and allow God the rightful place in our life—in the center of our life and on the throne of our life.

During these next 6 weeks, the Lord invites us to ask ourselves the question: **What will I allow God to change in my life?**



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Stations of the Cross"*

“RUNNING TOGETHER TOWARDS THE DEIFYING LIGHT”

BY: FR. LUKE DYSINGER, OSB



THEOSIS/DEIFICATION IN THE RULE OF SAINT BENEDICT AND THE LIFE OF BENEDICT BY POPE SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT (PART 3 OF 3)

In the first two articles of this series we noted how Saint Benedict's exhortation in the prologue of his Rule to "open our eyes to the deifying light" (RB, Prol 9) is an invitation to experience the loving, transforming presence of God. This occurs especially in our encounter with God through prayerful reading (lectio divina) of the Sacred Scriptures, but it also takes place in our daily experience of the brothers and sisters with whom we have the privilege of living in community.

If we wish to find a doctrine of deification in Benedict's Rule, then it is both in the Prologue and in Chapter 72 that he portrays most clearly the effects of opening our eyes to the "divinizing light." The result of our encounter with God is a heart opened wide by the practice of asceticism.

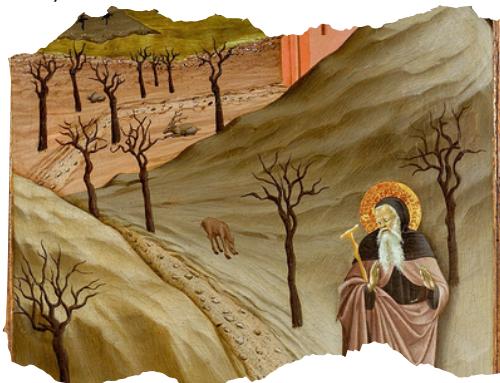
Through this discipline one is able to behold, even to venerate Christ who is perceived both within the depths of the monk's own heart and also in the other members of the monastic community with whom one journeys, "running" as it were "with widened heart" towards eternal life (RB Prol 47).

Chapter 72 is the next-to-last chapter and the concluding summary of Benedict's rule. It serves a literary purpose analogous to

Athanasius' portrayal of Antony the Great in chapter 14 of the Life of Antony, which portrays the vision of a return to the primordial, natural, and glorified state of humankind before the Fall.

Athanasius describes the monk, Antony, emerging from twenty years of solitary asceticism, a living icon of restored primordial integrity, and an example of the form divinization could take in a teacher and spiritual guide. Antony is "like an initiate in sacred mysteries, filled with God." Having achieved perfect inner balance he now lives "in accordance with nature." Antony further exemplifies the monastic virtues through his compassionate attentiveness to the spiritual struggles of those who seek his counsel. (*The Life of Antony* 14.7, 18-19)

In Chapter 72 of his Rule, Benedict offers a similar idealized portrait of the transforming power of monastic practice within a community. This chapter on the "good zeal which monks ought to have" gives concrete form to the Prologue's image of the "widened heart"; but it also expands on practical themes Benedict had introduced earlier in Chapter 7, the "Ladder of Humility". It will thus be helpful to briefly summarize Benedict's important modification of texts on humility he inherited from the earlier monastic tradition.



Saint Anthony Tempted by a Heap of Gold
by: The Sienese artist known as the
"Master of the Osservanza" (c. 1435)
<https://greatbooksguy.com/2020/01/16/thoughts-on-asceticism-in-athanasiuss-life-of-anthony/>

Numerous commentators have observed that Chapter 72 of Benedict's Rule effectively takes up where Chapter 7 on humility leaves off. Benedict's ladder of humility is taken almost word-for-word from the *Rule of the Master*, whose author had transformed John Cassian's twelve signs of humility (*Institutes* 4:28) into twelve steps or rungs of a ladder of humility (RM 10). These steps include mortification of desires, obedience, gentleness, patience, and restraint of speech. In all three authors, Cassian, the Master, and Benedict, this ascent of humility culminates in an even higher step: namely, love ("caritas"/"amor").

However, Benedict is not content to make love simply the goal or the spiritual result of humility: he recognizes that love is a necessary means and aid to ascent of this ladder; and thus unlike Cassian and the Master, he inserts the love of God ("amor Dei") already at the third step, insisting that Christian obedience be undertaken "for the love of God" (RB 7.34).

And whereas for Cassian and the Master, the signs or ladder of humility culminate in love "of virtue for its own sake," (*Institutes*.4.39.3; RM 10.90) Benedict insists that it is not simply "love", but rather "love of God", and indeed "love of Christ" that casts out the fear that had characterized the lower rungs of the ladder (RB 7.67-69).



How this love of Christ is practically manifested is the subject of Chapter 72. Here in the penultimate chapter of his Rule, Benedict describes the characteristics of a community that "runs together" towards God with "hearts expanded in love". Chapter 72 offers clear examples of what it means to honor, even to venerate, the presence of Christ in other members of the community through mundane acts of compassion and obedience. Benedict begins with the traditional and ancient contrast between two ways or paths, one leading towards, the other away from God. He describes two kinds of "zeal" (*zelus*): "an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell", and "a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to life everlasting."

The exercise of this good zeal has at its core Paul's injunction in Romans 12.10 (RB 72.4): "Let them outdo one another in showing honor." Thus the only permissible competition in the monastery is to become the best at perceiving and honoring Christ in one's confreres. This takes concrete form in ordinary encounters throughout the day, especially encounters that reveal limitations and brokenness, and tempt the monk to imagine that the "other" is the problem: "Let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character" (RB 72.5). The concept of competing in revering the God who is contemplated in the confrere is echoed in the commands: "Let them compete in showing obedience to one another. None should follow what he judges useful for himself, but rather what is better for another." (RB 72.6-7)



Saint Benedict's wise words on avoiding "the zeal of bitterness"
<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/03/21/saint-benedicts-wise-words-on-avoiding-the-zeal-of-bitterness/>

By doing this, the community grows in every imaginable form of love; and Benedict rings the changes of the Latin words for "love" ("caritas", "amor", "diligere") as he continues:

They should practice fraternal charity ("caritas") with purity; offering to God reverence of love ("amor"), loving ("diligere") their abbot with sincere and humble affection ("caritas") (RB 72.8-10).

His conclusion echoes the imagery he used at the end of the Prologue: namely, that of a community, now transformed by acquiring the practical skills of loving one another, moving together towards their heavenly goal: "preferring nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together ("pariter") to life everlasting." (RB 72.11-12)

This penultimate phrase, "preferring nothing whatever to Christ" appears to be a deliberate echo of both the earliest Latin version of the *Life of Antony* (Vita Prima 14.21-23) and the *Treatise on the Lord's Prayer* by Cyprian of Carthage. The final sentence is a reminder of Benedict's emphasis on the significance of the community in monastic observance. It is precisely within the community that the brethren learn to honor, to venerate, Christ. And no one goes alone to God: rather, the monks are brought together – "pariter" – to everlasting life.

This is the third in a series of articles on *theosis/deification* in the Rule of Saint Benedict and the Life of Benedict by Pope Saint Gregory the Great. These articles adapt an essay by the author entitled "Theosis/Deification in Benedict of Nursia and Gregory The Great: Contemplating Christ In The Other And In The Self," chapter 13 in *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*, ed. Jared Ortiz, (Catholic University of America Press, 2019) pp. 253-271. Detailed references to original sources mentioned here will be found in the original essay.

A MONK'S REFLECTION: The Heavens Declare the Glory of God-- Easter, Cosmic Time, and Benedictine Wisdom

Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

Each year, as Lent approaches, the same questions arise: Why does Easter change its date? Why does Ash Wednesday sometimes arrive early and at other times late?



The answers lead not merely to calendar calculations but to a profound theological vision shared by Scripture, early Christianity, and the Benedictine tradition—a vision in which time itself becomes a place of encounter with God.

Unlike Christmas, which is fixed to a civil date, Easter is determined by the rhythms of creation. The Church celebrates the Resurrection on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. From this single determination flow the entire cycle of Lent, Holy Week, and Pentecost. Even the ashes placed upon our foreheads depend upon the turning of the heavens.

Time becomes liturgical not because the Church controls it, but because she listens to it.

BIBLICAL ROOTS: SALVATION IN SACRED TIME

This way of measuring Easter emerges from the Jewish Passover, which itself is governed by lunar time and seasonal change.

Israel's liberation from Egypt was remembered not on an abstract date but at a moment shaped by moonlight and spring renewal. Jesus' death and resurrection occurred within this same sacred framework.

For the early Church, salvation did not unfold apart from creation. Divine action was revealed within the very structure of time: day and night, darkness and light, death and life.

Thus from the beginning, Christian worship assumed that the created order participates in God's saving work.

EARLY CHRISTIAN DISCERNMENT

The first centuries of Christianity witnessed genuine diversity regarding the celebration of Easter. Some communities emphasized fidelity to the Jewish date of Passover, while others insisted that the Resurrection must always be celebrated on Sunday. This difference was eventually resolved at the Council of Nicaea in 325.

The council established a principle rather than a formula: Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. In doing so, the Church united three rhythms of time—the solar year, the lunar month, and the weekly Lord's Day—into a single paschal proclamation.

The Resurrection was thereby placed at the intersection of heaven and earth.

ASH WEDNESDAY AND THE SHAPE OF CONVERSION

Ash Wednesday possesses no independent date. It is determined entirely by Easter, occurring forty-six days earlier so that forty days of fasting may be observed apart from Sundays.

This structure reveals something essential: Christian penance exists only in reference to the Resurrection.

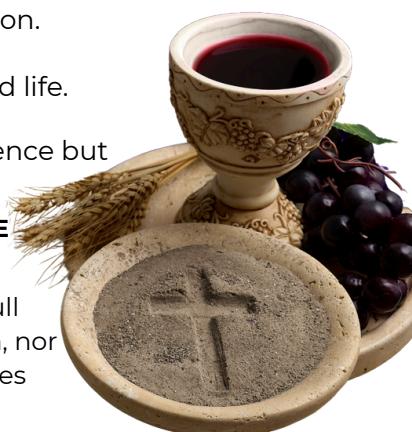
Even our return to dust is oriented toward life.

Our repentance is timed not by convenience but by hope.

CREATION AS PARTICIPANT IN PRAISE

The Church's reliance upon equinox and full moon does not reflect ancient superstition, nor a borrowing from pagan cosmology. It arises instead from biblical faith itself.

"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps 19:1).



The increasing light of spring, the balance of day and night, the awakening of life after winter—these realities speak the same language as the Easter Vigil, when darkness yields to flame and silence gives way to alleluia.

Creation is not merely the setting of salvation history. It is one of its witnesses.

BENEDICTINE TIME

St. Benedict expresses this theology with characteristic simplicity.

"We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and at all times." (*RB 19:1*)

The Rule assumes a sacramental understanding of time. The monastic day unfolds according to darkness and light, silence and song, labor and rest. Vigils anticipate dawn; Lauds welcomes it; Vespers receives the fading sun.

In this rhythm, time itself becomes a cloister.

The liturgical year does not interrupt monastic life; it reveals what monastic life already believes—that God is encountered not beyond time, but within it.

A QUIET ECOLOGICAL WISDOM

This attentiveness to cosmic rhythm carries an important implication for our own age. The Church's refusal to fix Easter permanently resists the modern impulse to dominate time and nature alike.

The liturgical calendar teaches patience. It honors limits. It invites reverence rather than control.

By waiting each year upon the heavens, the Church reminds us that creation is not a commodity, but a gift. Human flourishing cannot be separated from the well-being of the world that sustains us.

Care for creation thus emerges not as an added concern, but as a natural fruit of contemplative attention.

WAITING AS FAITH

The shifting date of Easter is not a problem to be solved but a wisdom to be received.

Each year the Church waits—for the moon to turn, for light to increase, for the feast to arrive. In that waiting, she confesses that salvation is not engineered, but given.

For Benedictines, this waiting is familiar. It is the waiting of vigils before dawn, of seeds beneath the soil, of psalms repeated until they reshape the heart.

The cosmos keeps the rhythm; the Church listens.

CONCLUSION

The determination of Easter and Ash Wednesday stands as one of Christianity's most enduring expressions of theological integration —uniting Scripture, tradition, creation, and prayer.

When the Church looks to the heavens to proclaim the Resurrection, she bears witness that Christ's rising is not only an event of the past, but a mystery inscribed into the fabric of time itself.

When monks chant the psalms as the seasons turn, they give quiet expression to Benedict's enduring conviction that:

God is present
in the movement of the stars,
in the changing of the seasons,
in the rhythm of prayer, and in every moment entrusted to us.
Everywhere. And at all times.



The vernal equinox marks the turning point when daylight begins to win out over darkness. At this moment, the direct rays of the Sun are shining down on the equator producing the effect of equal day and night.

<https://starwalk.space/gallery/images/spring-equinox-2026/1140x641.jpg>

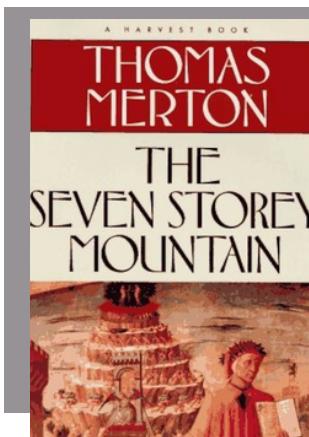
My Companions to the Liturgy of the Hours

(A grounding in Biblical scholarship and the guidance of thoughtful and experienced readers.)

Wayne Hubert, PhD, Obl. OSB

By the summer of 1940, Thomas Merton was living in liminal space, between his failure to gain entrance to a Franciscan seminary and his eventual entrance to the Abbey of Gethsemani. He felt “broken in pieces,” knowing that he had lost any chance for a “vocation to the cloister” (Merton p. 326). Up to this point, however, Merton had lived an independent and self-reliant life. He knew how to go it alone. So it wasn’t long before he made two decisions. First, he would “try to live in the world as...a monk in a monastery,” despite what the Franciscans or anyone else thought. He believed with all his heart that this is what God wanted for him (p. 328).

Second, to punctuate this first decision, Merton decided to buy a set of “breviaries,” and, with almost no help or guidance, he began to pray with them, despite the “jungle of the rubrics...small print and obscure canonical Latin” (p. 330).



Today, those of us who pray the Liturgy of the Hours and who also want to live more contemplative lives have many resources to help: the Rule of St. Benedict with commentaries; Abbey retreats and workshops; guides to the Hours like iBreviary; and local Oblate communities. I eventually became comfortable with the “how” of the daily practice, but I felt I needed expert help with the “what” of the Psalms and the Canticles. I had no experience with these ancient prayers and songs beyond the snippets included in the Mass. What I really needed was grounding in respected Biblical scholarship and the guidance of thoughtful and experienced readers.

When I discovered Fr. Gregory J. Polan's *The Psalms: Songs of Faith and Praise*, I felt that I had truly found a wise and accomplished guide to the Hours. The Psalms themselves are based on the *Revised Grail Psalms*, that Fr. Polan and the monks of Conception Abbey had worked on and were subsequently approved by the Conference of Catholic Bishops. More important to me was Fr. Polan's consideration for his readers. He intended his book for a wide audience, those seeking a deeper spiritual understanding and appreciation of the Psalms, but who also lacked any special technical background or training in Biblical exegesis (Polan, 2013, p.xiv).

For each Psalm, Fr. Polan includes a superscript or caption to announce the theme or essential insight of the prayer. For example, the superscript for Psalm 107 is "God's Faithful Love Endures forever." He uses his introduction to the Psalm to define and translate critical terms, to explain necessary Biblical background, and to point out the structure, the imagery, and the rhetorical style unique to the Psalm. In addition, Fr. Polan links each Psalm to the New Testament, thus "keeping alive in the mind of the reader how relevant these ancient prayers are to our Christian faith" (p. xvii). Finally, Fr. Polan follows each Psalm with a prayer, a kind of collect, emphasizing the themes and images in a way that encourages the reader to adapt them to his or her prayer life. Here is his beautiful prayer for Psalm 107:

*Lord God of heaven and earth,
who remain forever constant in
love and mercy despite our
countless infidelities: grant us
vision to see with eyes of faith
how you touch our lives
each day, freeing us from the
powers of darkness and guiding
us into the light of your risen
Son, Jesus Christ,
who is Lord, forever and ever.
Amen.*

THE PSALMS

Songs of Faith and Praise



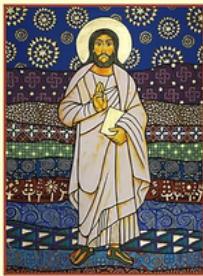
*The Revised Grail Psalter
with Commentary and Prayers*

Gregory J. Polan, O.S.B.

Recently, Paulist Press published *The Canticles of the Liturgical Hours: Praise from the Ends of the Earth*, Fr. Polan's companion volume to *The Psalms*. He tells us that the Canticles (little songs) are written in several literary genres, but they are also inspired writings through which "God continues to speak to us...inviting us to respond to their many and varied invitations to follow in the way of holiness" (Polan, 2025, p. xi). The Canticles are drawn from both the Old and the New Testament, from the prophets and Wisdom writers, from the letters of St. Paul, St. Peter, and the Book of Revelation. Fr. Polan employs the same format in the introductions to the Canticles as he did with the Psalms: superscript, necessary background, and a canticle prayer for each. Here, for example, is the superscript and prayer for the Canticle of Simeon (Nunc Dimittis):

THE CANTICLES OF THE LITURGICAL HOURS

Praise from the Ends of the Earth



GREGORY J. POLAN, OSB

A Light to the Nations

O Maker of the universe, who bring forth the dawn and draw day to its close, help us to recall with gratitude the blessings of this day, even with its failings and regrets, knowing that tomorrow you will offer us a new day in which we may affirm our dedication to you as the source of our strength and courage. And when we come to the twilight of life, may we readily offer back to you all the days you have given us, with the sure hope in your gracious redemption, through Christ our Lord.

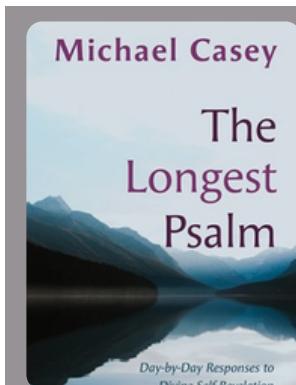
Fr. Polan addresses two other special issues in *The Psalms*. First, Psalm 119 with its 176 verses is the longest Psalm in the Psalter. He classifies it as a Wisdom Psalm which addresses "the matter of living well and full accord with divine teachings....The Psalmist uses simple, homespun language to get across the idea that living God's law is something practical ...yet demanding our daily attention" (Polan, 2013, p. 304). Despite its length, Fr. Polan captures the core insight of Psalm 119 and even includes a Psalm prayer.

However, the reader can supplement this reading with a remarkable book by Fr. Michael Casey, *The Longest Psalm: Day-by-Day Responses to Divine Self-Revelation*. Fr. Casey regards each of the 176 couplets as a self-standing unit, and they cannot be read quickly. "What is needed," he says, "is a slow meditative reading of each verse of the psalm, using the technique of close reading, letting no word pass unexamined" (Casey, p.1). He encourages the reader to engage in a bit of "creative wandering" to appreciate the 176 different ways of celebrating the life-enhancing role of God's self-revelation" (Casey, p.308). I decided to stroll through Casey's book during Lent one year, and it was indeed a powerful gift.

The second issue is how Fr. Polan deals with the "cursing Psalms." In the *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. I, paragraph 131, we are told that Psalms 58, 83, and 109—totaling 62 verses—are completely excluded from the Liturgy of the Hours. An additional 62 verses are omitted from twenty other Psalms as indicated in their headings (Just).

The omissions are because of their heavily imprecatory in character. Fr. Polan includes all the omitted Psalms and all the excluded verses, and he briefly addresses the issue of these missing texts in his introductions. To take the example of Psalm 109, Fr. Polan acknowledges its "vindictive language and images of retributive assault against others" (p. 279). So how are we to pray a Psalm like this? First of all, he says that we can acknowledge "the pain and anguish of those innocent persons who suffer hatred, scorn, or violence from their fellow human beings....and when we recite them serve to unite us in solidarity with those who have

no one to stand up for them, those whose innocent voices will never be heard...In faith, we... willingly pray for the deliverance that will ease their burdens and give them new hope" (Polan, p. 280).



**THE
RULE
OF
ST. BENEDICT
IN ENGLISH**

As a supplement to Fr. Polan's treatment of the "cursing Psalms," I enthusiastically suggest *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing with God through the Psalms* by Sister Irene Nowell, OSB. This was the first general treatment of the Psalms that I ever read, and it is a lively, vivid, even humorous introduction to the Psalter, and all that in just 94 pages. For example, here are a few of the excluded verses from Psalm 137: 8-9:

Sister Irene credits St. Benedict for teaching her how to pray Psalm 137 (p. 31). Our greatest enemies are our own sinful thoughts, says Benedict, and

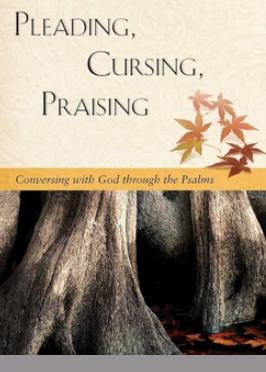
when those thoughts show up and they are still young, "dash them against Christ" (RB 4.50; Prol. 28). Concerning Psalm 109, she says "if you are looking for curses, [Psalm 109] is your best list" (p. 31). And it might be best to pray 109 with "the psalm in one hand and a newspaper in the other" (p. 34). Here, for example, she quotes verse 15:

**"Let it always stand before the Lord,
that their memory be cut that off
from the earth."**

O daughter Babylon, destroyer,
blessed whoever repays you the
payment you paid to us!
Blessed whoever grasps and shatters
your children on the rock.

She then asks if the reader can pray that verse against poverty, homelessness, drug abuse, mass shootings, church bombings, mass arrests of immigrants, and numerous other issues that make

the headlines (p. 31-32). She reminds us that we have a responsibility to "bring to God the pain and anger of those who suffer along with our own feelings" (p. 34) knowing that the Lord "stands at the right hand of the poor, to save his soul from those who condemn him" (Psalm 109: 31).



In all honesty, the Psalms and verses excluded from *The Liturgy of the Hours* are troubling and sometimes difficult to pray, especially in public worship. But Fr. Polan and Sister Irene remind us that one of the glories of the Psalter is that it sets the entire spectrum of human emotion before God, and we hardly need to protect God from harsh

and negative sentiments. Perhaps these difficult Psalms and verses are a kind of release required by fallen human nature, knowing that God will respond in his own way and time. Then we can say with Sister Irene, "Now it's your move, God" (p. 36).

When I first started praying with the Hours, I was just as frustrated with the rubrics as Merton was, and I was intimidated when facing the Psalms and the Canticles. Unlike Merton, however, I could never have learned to pray with the Hours by myself. Fortunately, I found three special companions during these past several years, and they continue to make all the difference.

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GREAT GAIN

Dr. Donald P. Richmond

My mother once owned a Bible that translated 1 Timothy 6:6 as “godliness is of great pain” (emphasis mine). Obviously a “typo,” substituting the word “pain” for the word “gain” was both laughable and lamentable. It was laughable because those who were biblically literate would readily recognize the mistake. Godliness is, in fact, a gain and not a pain! On the other hand, it was lamentable because there are so many people, Catholic Christians, who do not know their Bibles --- its books or its overarching business. Godliness may not be a great pain, but ignorance certainly is.

Words are important. Words really matter. One single word, one brief sentence, has changed (and can change) history. We have seen this in the history of the world. We have seen this in the history of the Church. We, quite likely, have experienced this in our own lives. How often have we heard or spoken words that should not have been spoken? Similarly, there have been times when we have said or heard something that has helped or “healed” us? Regarding both hurting or helping, a “word” about our own use of words must be made.

Saint Peter tells us that we must speak our words as though they were the very words of God (1 Peter 4:11). This is, indeed, a high and holy calling. Although he is not suggesting that our words will ever attain some form of scriptural authority, he is cautioning us about how we craft our conversation. He is exhorting and expecting us to use our words well. Upon examining my own language, and my own notable failures, there are several priorities of Christian communication that must be considered, and to which we must concentrate our efforts and consecrate our tongues.



Image of Saint Peter

Our words must be Christ-honoring. In our word-saturated culture, where words are countless, cheap and often pointless, followers of Jesus Christ seek to honor Christ in everything they say and do. When we speak, are our words honoring Christ? Are our words true? Are our words trustworthy? Are our words candid, clear, coherent and concise? Are we saying what we mean and meaning what we say? Like our Lord himself, are our words and our works (and there is a dynamic correlation between them!) full of both grace and truth? Christ-honoring communication is great gain!

Our words must bring Christ-conformity. Words not only shape our society; they also shape our souls. If we saturate ourselves in destructive words, we will be shaped by these destructive words. If we are speaking negative words, we will begin to think, feel and act negatively. Words craft our conscience and our conduct. Think of modern media. How many times have we utilized media to “keep informed,” but, more often than not, we come away feeling disappointed, deformed, deflated and defeated? This is exponentially exaggerated when we all know that all-too-frequently there is an absence of true truth in what is being said.

As a Pastoral Counselor and Spiritual Director, I know this well. All-too-frequently people engage in various forms of destructive self-talk. They constantly, or at least consistently, feed on ideas and words that are not in keeping with God’s perspective about themselves, others, or a great many other things. As a result, they begin to think, feel and act in ways contrary to the good news that Jesus Christ has for them. If we speak, either to ourselves or to another person, we must ask and answer this question: Are our words Christ-conforming? Our communication, both input and output, must encourage and empower conformity to Christ. Christ-conforming communication is great gain!

Our words must build Christ-culture. Language is culture. This should be obvious to anyone who reads history, Bible history in particular. One of the first things that occurs when one culture seeks to restrict or eliminate another culture is the restriction or elimination of their language. How Native Americans were robbed of their languages, and thus their cultures, is just one of many examples of this.

The Church is a culture. This culture is based upon a shared language and a shared understanding of that language. Words such as “sin,” “salvation,” “sanctification,” “glorification,” and many other words were (and are) our shared history, heritage, help and hope. But for many years these words have been, seriously compromised. Sadly, many of these words have been cheapened by churches. One particular denomination of which I am aware has become quite adept at using traditional Christian language, but adhering to rather untraditional lifestyles. They frequently cite the same words as I use, as any devout Catholic Christian might use, but they redefine these words in radical ways. They compromise both lip-service and life-service! They (using an old-fashioned word) dissimulate, and thus destroy the foundation and function of Catholic Christian culture. The late and great Bible Commentator Warren Wiersbe once wrote “He who uses Christ’s words, must also use Christ’s dictionary”.

If we are going to build Christ-culture, we must utilize and conform ourselves to Christ-language. Christ-cultured communication is great gain!

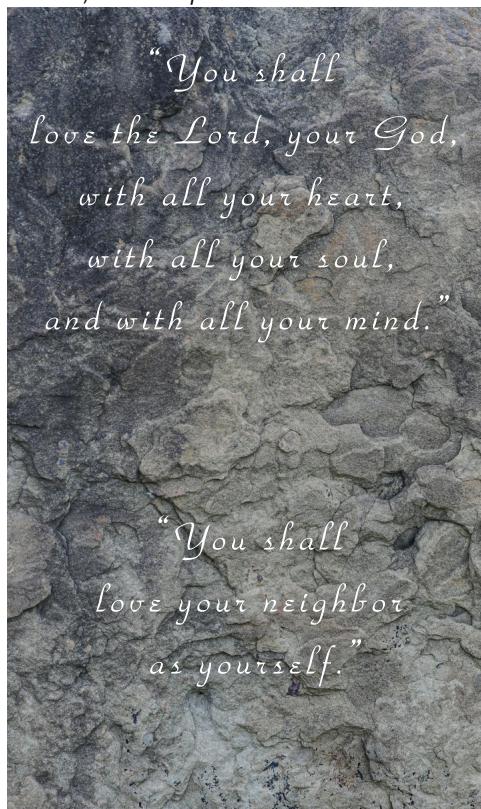
Our words must benefit Christ-commission. For some time, at least a year or two, I had an exceptionally LARGE sign on my front door. It alphabetically and vertically read as follows: **NO TRESPASSING: NO ADVERTISING, NO BROCHURES, NO CULTS, NO INFORMATION, NO KNOCKING, NO POLITICS, NO RINGING, NO SOLAR. IF YOU ARE NOT INVITED, GO AWAY!** How very evangelistic of me! How very Christlike! To be sure, I have had more than enough of advertisers wanting to sell me things I do not want or need. It is likely that you, also, share my disdain. Nevertheless, I am not entirely sure that my sign was a signature moment in my efforts at encouraging Christian maturity or effective Christian communication. If Jesus Christ is the Word, which He is, then it seems appropriate that we should seek conversations and not avoid them.



The Great Commission through the Great Commandment should shape our speech. What we say and how we say what we say must be guided and governed by the priority of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. A simple examination of the life of Christ makes this abundantly obvious. Quite frequently our Lord shaped some apparently random conversation into a redemptive conversation. Jesus made opportunities and took opportunities to engage in converting conversations with others. He wasn't just the Word, He walked and talked and lived the Word that He is, was and will be. Our words must be in, of, which is and through the Living Word. Christ-communication is converting-communication, which is a truly great gain.

There is **great gain** in well-ordered words. They shape us. They in some way "save" us. They also have the capacity to shape and save the Church and the world.

Dr Donald P. Richmond, Obl. OSB, a widely published author and sometime illustrator, is a frequent contributor to our Chronicle.



Around & About

The Monastery

January 17:

Former Abbot Primate of the Order of St. Benedict, Abbot Gregory Polan, OSB, helping the monks in preparation for the forthcoming abbatial election this coming May.



January 18th

Our very own Valyermo Liturgical Dance Group had their retreat led by John West Obl.OSB. With live music and dance, interpreting "By Flowing Waters" and "Coming to the Font" in an inspiring and uplifting movements, shared personal reflections, and original lyrics and melodies.

January 28- February 3

The President of the Benedictine Congregation of the Annunciation, Abbot Maksymilian Robert Nawara, OSB and the monastic community had their canonical visitation. It was a moment of great spiritual blessing. The community found renewal of gifts of our monastic vocations. We were shown how God has guided, protected, and inspired us to live our vows, our ministries, and our discernment of the divine providence in our past, present, and in our reckoning of our future. That, in all things, God be glorified!





February 8th:

Antonio Diaz, was received as Observer.



Monks doing dishes.



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UPCOMING
**SPRING & SUMMER
RETREATS**



FEBRUARY

17-20 Lenten Silent Retreat

28 (Day Retreat)
Poverty of Spirit

MARCH

16-19 Who Am I? Meeting the Self in the Prodigal Son

APRIL

11 (Day Retreat)
Pureza de corazon a través de los Corazones de Jesús y María

**27-
MAY 1** Spring Artist Retreat



MAY

2 Called and Empowered:
Discovering and Using Your Spiritual Gifts (Day Retreat)

11-14 Silent Retreat

JUNE

5-7 Called to Create and Illuminate

22 The Way of Beauty

26 Cinema Divina Retreat

6-10

The Flame Within:
Writing Your Life

10-12

Benedictine Spirituality

13

Iconography Workshop

25

(Day Retreat)
Got Joy?

27-31

The Transformative Power of Story

**31-
AUG 2**

Retiro de Silencio

AUGUST

7-9

Edith Stein

14-16

The Spirituality of Medieval Monks and Nuns

24-28

Healing our Wounds

28-30

Ancient and Modern Benedictine Spirituality

29

(Day Retreat)
Purity of Heart through the Hearts of Jesus and Mary

For complete descriptions of our overnight and day Retreats, please visit our website: Saintandrewsabbey.com or Call the Retreat Office: 661-944-2178.